

Nixon Didn't Know Of Watergate Plot, White House Says

July 4/24/73

Aides Hint At 'Purge' Of Staff

By ROBERT S. BOYD

Knight-Inquirer News Service
KEY BISCAIYNE, Fla. —

The White House insisted again Monday that President Nixon had no advance knowledge of the Watergate bugging plot.

"Of course not . . . he did not . . . know," said deputy press secretary Gerald R. Warren when asked about a Gallup poll which showed forty-one percent of those interviewed April 6 to 9 thought the President knew about Watergate all along. Another 32 percent thought he didn't know and 27 percent had no opinion.

The poll was taken before Mr. Nixon's dramatic April 17 statement when he said "major developments" had led him to open a new investigation of the bugging of Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington.

Warren said the President is spending "a great deal of time on Watergate" as he works in virtual seclusion at his villa here, preparing what is widely expected to be a sweeping purge of his administration.

Probe Separate

No staff changes or resignations have occurred yet, War-

ren said, and the President's investigation is continuing.

Mr. Nixon is keeping in touch with the inquiry by telephone, Warren said. The White House probe is headed by Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen, who took over when White House counsel John Dean was taken off the case. The White House investigation is said to be separate from the activity of the Federal grand jury in Washington, which has been hearing testimony from past and present administration officials.

A fresh batch of grand jury indictments is expected in the next few days. The President has promised to suspend any individual indicted and to fire any convicted. It is possible, however, that he could announce major staff changes without waiting for the grand jury.

'Serious Charges'

Warren refused to confirm or deny a Washington Post report that Mr. Nixon was warned as long ago as last December that some of his own staff aides were deeply involved in the bugging and a subsequent effort to cover it up.

He conceded, however, that the President learned of "serious charges" against mem-

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bers of his staff some time before March 21, when he ordered his own new investigation.

Warren would not say how early the warnings came to the President, but implied that hard evidence was lacking until March 21.

The date of the warnings is significant because it could affect the credibility of repeated White House claims that no one on the staff was involved in or had prior knowledge of the affair.

As recently as March 30, nine days after Mr. Nixon said his latest investigation began, press secretary Ronald Ziegler declared:

"As we have said before, no one in the White House had any involvement or prior knowledge of that event. I repeat that statement today."

Ziegler has since argued that he was speaking on the basis of information available to him at the time.

Claimed Innocence

Since April 17, high officials past and present have indulged in a veritable orgy of self-serving statements, claiming they were innocent and pointing the finger of blame at others.

In related developments:

—Three more cartons of Republican campaign finance records were delivered to U. S. District Court here Monday as Common Cause filed a motion asking that President Nixon's chief fundraiser, Maurice H. Stans, be ordered to deliver all records within 72 hours or be held in contempt of court.

As lawyers for the citizens lobby were filing the motion, Daniel Webster Coon, a lawyer for the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President, of which Stans is chairman, delivered the documents to the clerk's office.

—The associated Press reported Monday Senate sources said investigators have evidence there was an elaborate White House effort to cover up high-level involvement in the Watergate affair. The evi-

dence indicates Presidential aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman were among the participants, the sources were quoted as saying.

—Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D. Wis.) called Monday for the ouster of Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen as head of the government's Watergate investigation, which has taken almost a year to find out who headed the conspiracy. Reuss contended that Petersen actually "torpedoed" a house banking committee probe into the scandal last Fall on grounds that the "public interest in a prompt and successful prosecution may be imperiled by widely publicized hearings at this time."

—Thomas H. Kennelly, Washington lawyer for G. Gordon Liddy, convicted Watergate conspirator, asked Federal Judge John J. Sirica for permission to quit the case because Liddy has consistently refused his advice to tell all about the Watergate bugging. Kennelly said Liddy was "going up the river but he's not taking any captains or lieutenants with him."

—Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger broke his silence Monday on the Watergate case, saying it is difficult "to avoid a sense of the awfulness of events and the tragedy that has befallen people alleged to have done these things for whatever reason."

Kissinger, in response to questions about Watergate at the annual Associated Press luncheon, said he did not think the case would have any serious effect on foreign policy. "But this is not the moment for a senior official of the Administration to voice his opinion," he added.

Asked where he was the night Watergate was bugged, he replied, "I usually have excellent alibis for my evenings."

—The New York Times reported in its Tuesday editions President Nixon telephoned his personal reassurances to his embattled aide, John W. Dean 3d, Sunday, wishing him a "Happy Easter" and telling him "You're still my counsel," a source close to Dean said Monday.

—The Washington Star-News reported the discovery of yet another secret Republican campaign fund. The paper said the President's personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach, controlled a \$500,000 fund deposited in his hometown bank at Newport Beach, Calif. Kalmbach has previously told FBI agents he paid \$40,000 to Donald Segretti, an alleged GOP political saboteur.